SPORT

Stuttgart in the hunt to delay



in the Bundesliga title race on Wednesda

Ciprian Marica scored the winner in a 2-1 win at Schalke to stay two points behind leaders Wolfsburg with two games left.

Stuttgart are fourth in the table, but only two points separate the top four teams with Wolfburg, Bayern Munich and Hertha Berlin who all won on Tuesday - still ends on May 23.

Babbel, whose side now face to give his side three points.

in their last two games and Stuttgart need to finish in the top three remained to qualify for the Champions League.

> focused against Cottbus and then set ourselves up for the last day of the season clash with Bayern Munich. It is important to keep winning and try to get the European

Stuttgart's Brazil striker Cacau put his side ahead on 15 minutes with a good strike from 20 metres, but Schalke came back when Croatia midfield Ivan Rakitic curled in a free-kick on 39 minutes to make it 1-1.

In the second-half, in contention to be crowned Germany midfielder Thomas champions when the season Hitzlsperger drove a shot at Schalke goalkeeper Manuel "That was a very impor- Neuer who could only parry tant win for us," said his shot and Marica stabbed Stuttgart coach Markus home the ball on 56 minutes

Hamburg are fifth, but stay five points behind the leaders and effectively out of the title race, after Croatia striker Ivica Olic netted twice "Now we have to be just as as they hammered Bochum

> Germany midfielder Torsten Frings scored twice, including a penalty, as Werder Bremen routed Eintracht Frankfurt 5-0 as the UEFA Cup finalists stay 10th in the league.

> In the relegation battle, Borussia Moenchengladbach took a huge step towards safety with their second consecutive win when Brazilian Dante scored in injury time to seal a 1-0 win over Energie Cottbus.

> The result leaves 'Gladbach 14th, but only three points separate the bottom four places while Hoffenheim are seventh after their 2-0 win at Arminia Bielefeld.

An end to end move saw Marseille now looks too great

AFP, Paris



locked in the race for the French league title on Wednes-

day, with a victory apiece and just three matches left.

Marseille moved a step closer to their first title in 17 years after goals from Mamadou Niang and Brandao brought a 2-0 win at local rivals Nice.

Bordeaux then came from behind to beat nine-man Valenciennes 2-1 to go level on 71 points, but behind on goal difference.

Niang bagged the opener for Marseille with a fine shot on the turn after 26 minutes before Brazilian Brandao, who has averaged a goal every other game since his arrival from Shakhtar Donetsk mid-season, made the points safe on the hour.

Stadium in Rome on Wednesday.

ITALIAN CUP

Football

penalties following a 1-1 draw

Stadio Olimpico here on

Wednesday and qualify for

next season's Europa League.

Muslera saved two penalties in

the shoot-out, which went to

sudden death after both teams

missed one each of their first

Dabo scored the winning

Campagnaro had seen his

Zarate had given Lazio a

fourth minute lead but

just past the half hour mark.

Giampaolo Pazzini equalised

success such as this one and

a season of so many sacri-

fices," said a tearful Lazio

coach Delio Rossi.

"I've waited so long for a

shot saved.

AFP, Rome

home keeper Steve Marseille and Mandanda feed Hatem Ben Bordeaux Arfa, who found Taye Taiwo remained down the left flank. The ons. Nigerian quickly picked out Brandao, who nodded in as

> 21st minute after the Valenciennes striker had been brought down by Mathieu Chalme.

38th minute, heading in a in from a Chalme cross.

was compounded when coach Antoine Kombouare was sent to the stands while Siake Tiene and Luigi Pieroni were both red-carded in the last five minutes.

the seven-point gap with

Muslera Lazio hero

Lazio beat Sampdoria 6-5 on of their four cups in 1994.

to win the Italian Cup at the Mazzarri was proud of his

Lazio goalkeeper Nestor its name," he said. "It's very

Frenchman Ousmane wonder strike past Luca

Argentine forward Mauro and should have doubled their

my thoughts go out to the Castellazzi redeemed himself

players who deserve this after by crucially making a close-

"This (the tears) shows how utes later as Sampdoria equa-

much passion I have for my lised through Pazzini.

range block.

penalty after Hugo areaon four minutes.

team's efforts.

that's life."

work, I'm someone who has

Cup success and first since

2004. Sampdoria won the last

match, it was a final worthy of

disappointing to lose a final,

I'm sorry for our fans. But

start when Zarate lashed a

Castellazzi from outside the

dancy for the first half hour

range strike from Aleksandar

Kolarov and Macedonia for-

ward Goran Pandev was there

to mop up the loose ball but

The importance of that

save was evident three min-

advantage on 28 minutes.

Lazio were in the ascen-

Castellazzi spilled a long

Lazio were off to a flying

It was Lazio's fifth Italian

But their coach Walter

"We did justice to this fiercefree-kick.

wanted results for so long."

to close even if the former can win their tussle with the former European champi-

Paris Saint Germain moved to within a point of Lyon after Mateja Kezman scored Wednesday's only

Eight-times champions Nantes' loss at Lyon suggests they will now struggle to beat giants Saint Etienne won 4-2 at relegated Le Havre to the Canaries.

Saint Etienne, the biggest club in France in the mid-1970s, moved out of the bottom three, two points clear of Caen, who lost 1-0 to Rennes.

Le Havre briefly led before succumbing to late efforts from Mirallas and Riviere as the hosts suffered their 25th defeat of the season to confirm their bottom placing.

United's party

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger has vowed to wreck Manchester United's plans for a Premier League title party at Old Trafford on Saturday.

United need just a point from their lunchtime meeting with the Gunners to wrap up a third consecutive league triumph and equal Liverpool's record of 18 English titles.

But Wenger insists his players will be determined to delay the celebrations and claim revenge for their Champions League semifinal defeat by United, which led many to question the Frenchman's reliance on his homegrown youngsters.

"We have a very promising team who can deliver very soon," Wenger claimed Thursday. "If you look at the statistics of the two teams, we have scored a similar amount of goals. In the passing quality in the final third and in the opposition half, we are as good as Manchester United.

"We have conceded more goals and that is where the difference lies; we have conceded 36, they have conceded 24, we have scored 64, they have scored 67.

"Offensively, I do not believe there is a difference. Defensively, there was a differ-

Even if they lose to Arsenal, United will still be champions if they pick up a point at struggling Hull on the final day of the season or if Liverpool drop any points in their two remaining matches, away to West Brom and at home to Tottenham.

"It looks like it will be Manchester United, but we can still delay it," Wenger added. "We have a point to prove, definitely.

"We want to play for our pride and be respected for who we are, that is people who love the game they play. We promised ourselves on January 1 we would give everything in every game until the end of the season.

"That is where we can show we are capable to do that."



Barcelona captain Carles Puyol celebrates with the King's Cup after their victory in the final against Athletic Bilbao at the Mestalla on Wednesday.

Barca lift Kings Cup

Football

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona stayed on course for an historic treble by crushing Athletic Bilbao 4-1 at the Mestalla Stadium on Wednesday to lift the Kings Cup for the first time in over a decade.

Gaizka Toquero headed Bilbao into a ninth-minute lead, but Yaya Toure equalised with a great solo goal and then Barca blitzed their rivals with three goals from Lionel Messi, Bojan Krkic and Xavi in 12 minutes to lift the cup for the first time since 1998.

It was coach Pep Guardiola's first trophy as a manager and Barcelona's first piece of silverware in two seasons although the Spanish league title could soon follow with only a point needed at Real Mallorca on Sunday to secure a 19th championship.

"We hope it's an historic week and we will go for the second title this weekend," said defender Gerard Pique.

"We just want to enjoy this win first and then concentrate on trying to win more titles."

The final part of the treble - ness it is undoubtedly setwhich no Spanish team has ever achieved - is the Champions League final against Manchester United on May 27.

For Bilbao, who have won

the cup 23 times, it was bitter disappointment in their first final since 1985. Barcelona were without Andres Iniesta and Thierry

Henry through injury so the talented Bojan, 18, started the switched to left back to replace the suspended Eric Abidal while midfielder Toure

was deployed at centre-half.

The last time these two sides met in the final was back in 1984 when Bilbao won 1-0 at the Santiago Bernabeu, although the game was remembered more for the post-match brawl between a number of players, including the great Diego Maradona in what was his final game for Barcelona.

There was little animosity between the two sides 25 years on although Barca were furious at the constant fouling suffered by Messi.

If Barcelona have a weak-

pieces and Bilbao exploited that early on with Toquero heading in a whipped-in corner after just nine min-

It was just the start Barcelona didn't want although Guardiola's side should have equalised in the 19th minute when Samuel Eto'o, the league's top-scorer, got the ball caught up between his feet and the chance went begging.

At the back, Carles Puyol Toure showed Eto'o the way forward after 31 minutes, surging from central defence before beating two Bilbao players and then dispatching a fierce right-footed shot into the corner.

Messi twice went close to scoring early in the second half and finally got his goal in the 54th minute after Bilbao failed to clear their lines.

Barca turned the screw with Bojan netting three minutes later with an immaculate finish after Bilbao got caught out on the counter

attack. Xavi curled in a free-kick in the 64th minute to torment Bilbao further as Barca lifted their 25th Kings Cup.

But Rummenigge said he

"If we had wanted some-

Clooney," Rummenigge com-

"I rang Klaus Allofs (Bre-

mented only a few days ago.

wanted to bring in a no-

nonsense football man to

34 police officers, although none were seriously hurt.

Ajax try to lure Olsen

AFP, The Hague

Dutch league giants Ajax are hoping to lure Denmark coach Morten Olsen back to the club following the resignation last week of Marco Van Basten, according to reports Thursday.

forge Munich into a powerful side to challenge for their first said the Amsterdam club has Champions League title since decided to sound out Olsen following successive refusals from Co Adriaanse, Frank one who is everyone's darling, Rijkaard and Michael we would have signed George

Laudrup. The 59-year-old Olsen, a former coach of Ajax from Meanwhile, Rummenigge 1997 to 1999, confirmed in the added that Werder Bremen report he had beeb contacted midfielder Diego will not be "by a club" but refused to say going to Bayern with the which "out of respect for the Brazilian play-maker set to

join Italian giants Juventus The Dane then evoked the possibility of combining his job with the national team men's director of sport) this with that of a club-level coach morning and he said there is an agreement in principal but admitted such a deal with Juventus for Diego," said would "need the agreement of

> Denmark are currently well positioned to qualify for the

ing to reports; are Ronald Koeman, Gertjan Verbeek and Danny Blind, the club's cur-

rent sports director.

Despite his legendary

Van Gaal Bayern's

Football

AFP, Berlin

German giants Bayern Munich confirmed on Wednesday that Dutch coach Louis van Gaal will take over as head coach on July 1 having signed a two-year contract to replace the fired Jurgen Klinsmann.

Having led AZ Alkmaar to the Dutch title this season, the 57-year-old has signed a deal with the Bundesliga champions, ending weeks of speculation over whether or not he would succeed Klinsmann, who was fired on April 27.

"We are happy to have signed an experienced and successful football coach for Bayern Munich such as Louis van Gaal," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge in a statement.

"We wanted him to come to Bayern and Louis van Gaal wanted to come to us, it was just a case of sorting out the details."

Having steered Ajax to the Champions League title in 1995, the fiery Van Gaal has a wealth of experience having led the giants from Amsterdam to consecutive Dutch titles between 1994, 1995 and 1996.

In 1998 and 1999, he also won La Liga with Barcelona before taking charge of the Dutch national side in 2000, but failure to lead them to the World Cup finals in 2002 meant he was replaced by Dick Advocaat.

Then followed brief spells at Ajax and Barcelona, before he joined AZ in 2005 which culminated in Alkmaar winning the Dutch title on April 19 this year just after their decisive 28-game undefeated run 2001. was brought to an end.

Not lacking in selfconfidence, Van Gaal boldly stated: "I am the best" after winning the Dutch title and Bayern's bosses seem to agree.

Bayern captain Mark van Bommel insisted recently: "You won't find a player who has anything negative to say about him." Not everyone would agree next season.

and Bulgaria striker Hristo

Stoichkov contradicted Van Bommel when he once famously remarked: "Van Gaal is a total fool" after the pair worked together at Barcelona.



LOUIS VAN GAAL

Ireland close

Antonio Cassano sent a

deep cross over from the left to

Lithuanian Marius

Stankevicius at the back post

and his header across goal was

the stroke of half-time but

Muslera tipped over Cassano's

who threatened again but the

late arriving Pasquale Foggia

couldn't control his volley

create anything significant for

the remaining half hour and

even less so in the 30 minutes

the sides and Muslera made a

good start saving from

wiped out when Tommaso

Rocchi hit the post and saw

the ball run across the face of

Muslera saved from

Campagnaro and Dabo

stepped up to stroke home the

But then in sudden death

goal and away to safety.

ball and claim the cup.

Penalties would separate

Lazio's advantage was

Both sides then failed to

Sampdoria came close on

On the hour, it was Lazio

diverted in by Pazzini.

from Pandev's cross.

of extra-time.

Cassano.

Mark Hughes has confirmed Stephen Ireland is close to agreeing a new long-term contract with Manchester

the Blues' outstanding player this term, with many observers feeling he was unfortunate to be beaten to the PFA Young Player of the Year trophy by Aston Villa's Ashley Young.

place over a new deal, with Hughes optimistic the outcome will be positive.

"We are very close with Stephen," confirmed Hughes. 'We had good discussions with him last week and there is intent on both sides.

himself and said he wants to spend most of his career here, which was very heartening from our point of view. As long as there are no hiccups, and I don't anticipate there will be, it will get done very quickly."

Sampdoria star Antonio Cassano (L) shrugs off Lazio defender Stephan Lichtsteiner during their Italian Cup final at the Olympic

to new deal INTERNET, undated

The midfielder has been

And while Ireland remains indifferent about the prospect of an international comeback with the Republic of Ireland, he has expressed a desire to remain with City.

Further talks have taken

"We want Stephen to be here for a considerable length of time and he has come out

Perez eyes comeback

AFP, Madrid

Former Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, who helped bring a host of world stars to the club including David Beckham, Thursday announced he plans to return to the post in elections next month.

The hugely successful businessman said he made the decision as a result of the "serious events" at the reigning Spanish champions in recent months.

Former president Ramon Calderon resigned on January 16 over allegations he rigged voting at the club's last general assembly in December, which approved its financial accounts.

"We have experienced three years of convulsion and improper behaviour at the greatest sports institution in the world," Perez told a news conference. "This club has always been

characterised by fairness and generosity. It is a sad period that we must overcome.' Perez promised "a spectac-

ular sports plan" for the club. "We have to compete with Chelsea, with Manchester

United, with Barcelona, we want to lead European football again," he said. Perez led Real from 2000 to 2006, when it earned the nickname "Los Galacticos", winning the Primera Liga twice and European

stars as Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo, Luis Figo and Beckham. Man drowns during

Champions League with such

celebrations AFP, Madrid

A man fell into a river and drowned and police arrested 45 people for disturbances as Barcelona supporters celebrated the club's victory in Spain's King's Cup.

The Catalan giants stayed on course for an historic treble by crushing Athletic Bilbao 4-1 on Wednesday to lift the Cup for the first time in over a decade.

The man of about 35 years of age died after falling into the River Onyar in the town of Girona, near Barcelona, during the victory celebrations, a

police spokesman said. Around 40,000 Barca supporters gathered in the city's Plaza de Cataluya y Canaletes, where a group of about 300 began pelting police vehicles with bottles, cans and other

objects, the spokesman said. Police intervened when the rioters also threw objects at

other supporters, detaining 45 people, five of them minors. Medical services also treated 109 people, including

De Telegraaf newspaper

Danish federation". all three parties concerned".

2010 World Cup in South Africa. They sit top of Europe zone qualifying group 1 ahead of Hungary and Portugal. Also in the running to succeed Van Basten, accord-

Van Basten stood down last week after failing to guide the Dutch giants into next year's Champions League.

status at the club where he made his name, Van Basten was forced to admit he "was partly responsible" for the team's results and two weeks ago asked for "a second chance" to remain at the helm.

Energie Cottbus and Bayern AFP, Berlin



Marseille step closer

league win of the campaign. Gael Danic penalty in the

Fernando levelled in the

Valenciennes's misery

Lyon have 64 points but

Marseille clinched their 20th

free-kick from Yoann Gourcuff and it was Gourcuff who ensured the three points, eight minutes from time when he slotted the ball

Bordeaux fell behind to a

goal at Le Mans.

the dreaded drop with just 33 points from their 35 games especially as fellow former move three points clear of

